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## Naval Hospital Pensacola Corpsman Awarded Silver Star

BY VJOHNSON – MARCH 20, 2014  
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HM3 Zackery Penner, a corpsman with Naval Hospital Pensacola, was awarded the Silver Star March 19 for actions while serving with 1st Battalion, 8th Marines in Afghanistan in the summer of 2012. Major Gen. Raymond Fox, commanding general of the II Marine Expeditionary Force, presented the medal to Penner at the hospital. (Photo courtesy of Naval Hospital Pensacola)

“I didn’t think, I just reacted,” said HM3 Zackery Penner, a corpsman with Naval Hospital Pensacola, when recalling the events of June 22 and 23, 2012, while serving with Bravo Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Marines in Afghanistan.

For his actions on those two days, Penner was awarded the Silver Star, the third highest military decoration for valor, on March 19 at a ceremony here.

On June 22, 2012, with approximately 30 days left in country, Penner’s platoon encountered Afghan insurgents on the first day of a seven day operation, and a Marine was severely wounded on a nearby rooftop. Without hesitation, Penner ran to the Marine while exposing himself to enemy fire that was only 50 meters away. With rounds impacting all around him, he



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treated and evacuated the Marine. Though the Marine did not survive from the wounds he sustained, Penner’s actions reflected the relationship and camaraderie shared between Marines and corpsmen.

“Marines love their corpsmen, and I love being with Marines,” said Penner, who enlisted in the Navy immediately after graduating high school in Sacramento, Calif. “I wanted to be a corpsman because I wanted to help Marines.”

Penner got to help a Marine again the very next day. While on a partnered patrol with Afghan soldiers, insurgents attacked his squad with machineguns and precision fire weapons. When two members of the patrol sustained injuries, a Marine and an Afghan soldier, Penner ran more than 100 meters through enemy fire to reach the casualties and quickly established a casualty collection point behind a wall. When the squad began receiving enemy fire from the rear, Penner shielded the casualties from enemy fire with his own body until the evacuation aircraft arrived. Both casualties would ultimately not survive, but Penner again sustained no injuries despite putting himself in harm’s way.

“It never crossed my mind that I wouldn’t be hurt,” said Penner. “It’s actually hard to remember the events of those two days in detail now because I just reacted.”

After returning from the seven day operation, Penner immediately contacted his wife.

“I couldn’t tell her what happened because of [operational security], but I wanted her to know I was OK,” said Penner, whose grandfather served in the Navy during World War II.

Penner also called the Marine’s family that he evacuated from the rooftop.

“He was my best friend, and I wanted to talk to them,” said Penner before trailing off.

The relationship between Marines and their corpsmen was further demonstrated as a large number of Marines attended the ceremony including Maj. Gen. Raymond Fox, commanding general, II Marine Expeditionary Force.

“The relationship the Marine Corps has had with corpsmen for a long time is what saves a lot of Marines, and and [Marines] cherish that relationship incredibly,” said Maj. Gen. Fox. “Every one of us should aspire to do what he did when called upon.”



Marines with Marine Aviation Training Support Group 21 from Naval Air Station Pensacola pose for a photo with HM3 Zackery Penner, a corpsman with Naval Hospital Pensacola, who received the Silver Star March 19 during a ceremony at the hospital. Penner was awarded the medal for his actions while serving with 1st Battalion, 8th Marines in Afghanistan in the summer of 2012. (Photo courtesy of Naval Hospital Pensacola)

After returning from Afghanistan, Penner received orders to NHP where he currently works in the Emergency Department. Initially, Penner planned on fulfilling his current enlistment and then leaving the Navy, but being stateside has given him a new perspective.

“The stress of working in the Emergency Room does not compare to the stress of combat,” said

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Penner. “Being stationed at a hospital stateside is a lot calmer.”

Penner is currently taking college classes and is now planning on continuing his career in the Navy. He is considering the Medical Enlisted Commissioning Program and hopes to eventually receive orders to a naval hospital in California to be closer to his family.

When asked about how he felt about receiving the Silver Star, Penner replied, “It’s humbling.” “I was in the right place at the wrong time, but any of the Marines would have done the same thing.”



About vjohnson

- *John Christopher Betz*  
When the going gets tough the tough get going and the weak.....  
Penner did his job without thoughts or hesitation about his own  
Well being.